(d) if so, the time by which it is likely to be constructed; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) No, Sir.

(c) No, Sir. There is no plan to construct a separate building for the Central Telegraph Office, Purnea.

(d) Question does not arise.

(e) There is a plan to shift the Central Telegraph Office, Purnea to the Departmental Exchange Building.

Palace on Wheels

2516. SHRI TARACHAND BHAGORA :
SHRI PARASRAM MEGHWAL :

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the 'Palace on Wheels' train being run on the narrow-gauge line in Gujarat have been incurring losses;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether there is any proposal to run it again in Rajasthan; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN) : (a) No narrow gauge tourist train is running in Gujarat Sector by the name of 'Palace on Wheels'.

(b) Does not arise

(c) No, Sir.

(d) Does not arise.

[English]

Construction of Over-Bridge

2517. SHRI KESHAB MAHANTA : Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government propose to construct a Railway Over-bridge at Agthuri between Changsari and Guwahati; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and the time by which the work is likely to be started?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) A Road Over Bridge in lieu of level crossing No. SK/2 at km. 8/0-1 between Agthuri and Changsari has been sanctioned during the Works programme of 1996-97 the Plan and Estimate for which are being prepared. The work will be taken up after the state Govt. starts work on approaches.

[Translation]

Research Work in Steel Industry

2518. SHRI NAWAL KISHORE RAI :
SHRI NITISH KUMAR :

Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government have made the provision of an expenditure of Rs. 150 crore for undertaking research work in Steel Industry during the current year;

(b) if not, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether the technology used in steel production in the Country needs much improvement;

(d) if so, the technologies used in China, America, Russia and Japan alongwith the production cost of steel under the technologies separately; and

(e) the extent to which the production cost will be less when the production is undertaken through these technologies in comparison to the technology already being used in India?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINISTER OF MINES (SHRI BIRENDRA PRASAD BAISHYA) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) The technologies used in the steel production in India need upgradation in many areas. The technology upgradation is a continuous process and the extent of improvement required depends upon the status of technologies in different companies.

As far as Steel Authority of India Ltd. (SAIL) is concerned, the company is constantly pursuing various modernisation programmes to suitably upgrade the level of technology in different SAIL plants.

In RINL/VSP, upgradation of technology is required in some of the areas like utilisation of waste energy in sinter plant for energy conservation, incorporation of expert system and computerisation at blast furnace for improving the productivity, incorporation of pulverised Coal Dust Injection and oxygen enrichment ot improve the productivity and to reduce the production cost, automation and midernisation of continuous casting machines and introduction of facilities like oil water mist cooling and electro-magnetic stirring for improving the productivity and

quality of the product at continuous casting machines, introduction of additional facilities for secondary steel making for improving the intrinsic quality of steel etc.

(d) The level of technologies in other countries can be represented as follows :

Sl. No.	Parameters	China	USA	Russia	Japan	India
1.	% of steel Produced through BOF route (1996)	70	58	52	67	54
2.	% of steel processed through secondary refining (1993)	35	86	-	96	21
3.	% of steel continuously cast (1996)	51	93	41	94	34

Technology no doubt plays an important part in production cost of steel but there are several other factors which equally influence the production cost. Hence, the comparison of the date of production cost of one country and other country and from one plant to other plant will not reflect the true effect of technology on production cost.

(Source : For Sl. No. 1 & 3 IISI World steel in figures (1997 edition); For Sl. No. 2 Report of the Sub-group No. 4 of the Working Group on Iron & Steel Industry constituted by Planning Commission for 9th Five Year Plan)

(e) The new technologies, it is felt, are cost effective and improve the competitive edge as these technologies are able to enhance the productivity of the plant. They also improve the quality of the products which improves the overal competitiveness. However, it is not possible to quantify and compare such issues because the production costs are influenced by many factors other than technolgoy itselt.

[English]

Performance of Postal Saving Schemes

2519. SHRI ANANT GUDHE : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government have assessed the performance of Postal Savings Schemes being operated through Department of Posts for the last three years in Maharashtra;

(b) if so, the details thereof for rural and urban areas in general and district-wise for Amra Division in particular as per standard norms of assessment;

(c) the total number of Agents operating in Amraoti Division, district-wise and the quantum of funds mobilised under the saving Schemes including Recurring Deposit Scheme together with the commission paid to the Agents thereon and the nature of difficulties faced by the depositers and agents in realisation of their dues from postal authorities; and

(d) the efforts being made to streamline the postal operations and to mop up savings from small investors in rural and urban areas?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA) : (a) Deptt. of Post handles the Small Savings Bank work as on agent on behalf of the Ministry of Finance which is the nodal Ministry for the policy making and rule framing of the Small Savings Schemes.

The Deptt. of Post monitors the operation of Post Office Savings bank to ensure its smooth implementation and to remove the public grievance, if any. The details about the gross deposits and the net deposits in the postal savings schemes for the last three years in Maharashtra one given in Statement-I attached.

(b) The Deptt. of Post has a well defined administrative machinery and prescribed procedure to redress the public grievance not only at the Directorate level but also in the States and the Districts, covering the urban as well as rural areas. The complaints are settled expeditiously as per the prescribed procedure.

(c) The details regarding the total number of the Agents under the Standardised Agency System (SAS) and the Mahila Pradhan Bachat Yojana (MPKBY) in Amraoti Division are 1226 and 1706 respectively. The details of the fund mobilisation through the agents under the small saving schemes, including RD scheme and the details of commission paid to the SAS agents only as available with the postal authorities are given in Statement II attached.

The depositors have sometime encountered difficulties on getting matured amount of RD Accounts due to abnormal heavy premature closure of RD Accounts through out the division/district. To alleviate the problem, steps have been taken to clear the work on payment of incentive to staff and engagement of extra manpower. No difficulty is faced by Agents.

(d) The deptt. of post constantly monitors the public grelvance and has gone in for modernisation of SB work, including computerisation, to provide efficient and customer friendly service. As and when required, based upon the feedback from the field units, the deptt. of post takes up with the ministry of finance for the revision of the post office savings bank rules as the ministry of finance is the nodal ministry for the small saving schemes.